DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 237 847 CG 017 101

AUTHOR Ross, Michael J.; Mueller, John H.
TITLE Consistency of the Self-Schema in Depression.
PUB DATE 6 May 83
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (55th, Chicago, IL, May 5-7, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cognitive Processes; College Students; *Depression (Psychology); Higher Education; Psychological Characteristics; *Psychological Patterns; *Schemata (Cognition); Self Concept; *Self Congruence

ABSTRACT

Depressed individuals may filter or distort environmental information in direct relationship to their self perceptions. To investigate the degree of uncertainty about oneself and others, as measured by consistent/inconsistent responses, 72 college students (32 depressed and 40 nondepressed) rated selected adjectives from the Derry and Kuiper Depressed and Nondepressed Content Word List according to how well the words described themselves or a best friend. After the rating phase, subjects were administered the Buss Self-Consciousness Scale and were readministered the word list. An analysis of the results showed that depressed college students were more inconsistent in self-schema than their nondepressed counterparts. Nondepressed and mildly depressed students used different information processing strategies. Nondepressed students relied on congruence with the self-schema, while depressed students used a strategy based on familiarity or distinctiveness. (BL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED237847

CONSISTENCY OF THE SELF-SCHEMA IN DEPRESSION

Michael J. Ross
John H. Mueller
University of Missouri-Columbia

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

X Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael J. Ross

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 017101

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, IL, May 5-7, 1983

Paper presented at the annual meetings of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, May 6, 1983.

CONSISTENCY OF THE SELF-SCHEMA IN DEPRESSION

Michael J. Ross and John H. Mueller
University of Missouri-Columbia

The present study investigated the degree of uncertainty about oneself and others in depressed and nondepressed college students. The rationale for this study comes from a growing body of research on schematic information processing in depression (see, for example; Davis, 1979; Davis & Unruh, 1981; Derry & Kuiper, 1981; Kuiper, Derry, & MacDonald, 1982). This research conceptualizes the self as a cognitive structure, or schema, which contains various attributes or representations of the self. Additionally, the self-schema is presumed to influence the encoding and processing of personally relevant information, such that environmental information related to self or others may be filtered or distorted (Kuiper, Olinger, & MacDonald, in press).

Developmental models of self-schematic processing in depression (e.g., Davis, 1979; Kuiper et al., 1982) have suggested differences in the content and function of the self-schema between individuals along an imaginary continuum from nondepression to severe depression (Kuiper et al., 1982). Individuals at the opposite ends of this continuum--nondepressed normals and long-term clinical depressives--are characterized by relatively powerful or strong self-schemas which efficiently organize and process information congruent with the content of the self-schema. Not surprisingly, the content of the self-schema differs for the

nondepressed and the clinically depressed individual. The nondepressive's self-schema is characterized as containing predominantly positive or at least nondepressed features, while that of the long-term clinical depressive's is generally negative or depressed in its content (Derry & Kuiper, 1981). It has also been suggested (Davis, 1979) that individuals at the ends of this nondepressed to severely depressed continuum are characterized by relatively stable or consistent self-schemas, which in turn may account for the stability of cognitive distortions of environmental input.

Somewhere in the middle of this continuum lies the mild depressive. Research (Kuiper & MacDonald, 1982) has found that, unlike nondepressives or clinical depressives, the mild depressive incorporates both depressed and nondepressed content in the self-schema. Additionally, investigations of the functioning capabilities of the self-schema have demonstrated a positive correlation between the strength or efficiency of the self-schema and self-reported duration of depression (Davis, 1979). These findings have led the proponents of a developmental model of self-schematic processing in depression to suggest that mild depressives may be characterized by an inconsistent self-schema (Davis, 1979). As such, the mild depressive's self-schema is presumed to be relatively weaker than the self-schema of the nondepressive or the more severe, clinical depressive, and also contains conflictual positive and negative content.

The present study was designed to investigate this notion of an unstable or inconsistent self-schema as a characteristic of less severe depressives. It was predicted that depressed college

students, who would fall somewhere in the middle of the nondepressed-severely depressed continuum, would be more inconsistent when describing themselves than would their nondepressed counterparts. Inconsistency was measured by determining the number of dissimilar ratings of descriptiveness across three presentations of an equal number of depressed and nondepressed personal adjectives. Thus, inconsistency would be reflected in terms of two yes and one no or two no and one yes descriptiveness ratings across the three presentations of a word and consistency would be indicated by three yes or three no descriptiveness ratings across the three trials. Additionally, the effects of the predicted inconsistency on the processing of information was examined by the inclusion of an incidental recognition task following the rating phase.

Method

Subject selection was determined by contacting university undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology course who had scored at the lower and upper extremes on the Dempsey D-30 (D-30; Dempsey, 1964) compared to over 800 of their classmates. Thirty-two subjects who scored at the upper extreme on the D-30 and who also scored above 13 on the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI; Beck, 1978) administered at the time of the actual experiment comprised the depressed subject group. The nondepressed group consisted of forty subjects who scored at the lower extreme on the D-30 and who scored less than 5 on the Beck Depression Inventory.

Subjects rated one of two sets of 32 adjectives selected from the 64-item Derry and Kuiper (1980) depressed- and nondepressed-content word list. Half of these adjectives were presented once and half were presented three times. Thus, each subject saw 8 depressed words presented one time, 8 depressed words presented three times, 8 nondepressed words presented one time and 8 nondepressed words presented three times. Subjects rated each word in terms of how well that word describes him or herself or how well that word describes his or her best friend. The inclusion of the familiar, well-liked other rating task was to investigate whether mild depressive's predicted inconsistency is generalized to include significant others and also to investigate some of the functional aspects of the self-schema.

Following the rating phase, subjects were administered the Buss Self-Consciousness Scale (Buss, 1980) to limit the effects of short-term memory. Subjects were then presented with a previously unannounced recognition test consisting of the 32 words from the rating phase and the remaining 32 words from the Derry and Kuiper word set which had not been presented previously.

Results and Discussion

For both ratings and recognition, a 2 x 2 x 2 x 4 analysis of variance was conducted with Depression (depressed, nondepressed) and Task (self, other) as between-subjects factors and Word Content (depressed, nondepressed) and Consistency/Descriptiveness as within-subjects factors. The four levels of the Consistency/Descriptiveness factor were consistent-descriptive (rated *yes* three times), consistent-nondescriptive (rated *no* three

times), inconsistent-descriptive (rated yes twice and no once), and inconsistent-nondescriptive (rated no twice and yes once).

Since the focal point of the investigation was decision inconsistency, I will present only those analyses which involved the words presented three times during the study phase and confine my remarks to summarizing some of the most important findings of these effects. Likewise, in the interest of time, I will not be discussing specific findings related to the significant other rating task today, but I will be happy to provide further details to anyone who wants them.

Insert Table 1 about here

In terms of ratings, as Table 1 shows, there was a significant Depression x Word Content x Consistency/Descriptiveness interaction ($F(3,204) = 9.48$, $p < .0001$). Looking at the first two rows in Table 1, depressed subjects were more likely to consistently rate a depressed word as descriptive and less likely to consistently rate it as nondescriptive than their nondepressed counterparts. And, as the third and fourth rows show, depressed subjects were more likely to be inconsistent in their ratings of depressed words than nondepressed subjects , but significantly so only when the inconsistency involved a word ultimately judged descriptive (i.e., two yes and one no, Ms = .97 vs. .32). For nondepressed words, in the bottom half of Table 1, there were no differences between the

two groups in terms of either descriptiveness ratings or in terms of the consistency with which those ratings were made.

Insert Table 2 about here

Focusing only on the self task, a priori mean comparisons generated from the nonsignificant Depression x Task x Word Content x Consistency/Descriptiveness interaction ($F < 1$) indicated that the two groups differ only in terms of depressed subject's inclusion of depressive content in their self-schema. As shown in Table 2, line 1, depressed subjects rated more depressed words consistently as descriptive of themselves ($M = 2.50$) than did nondepressed subjects ($M = .58$). Most importantly for the inconsistency hypothesis, as can be seen in line 3, there was a trend ($t(272) = 1.25$, $p < .11$) for depressed subjects to more frequently be inconsistent in their self ratings than nondepressed subjects ($Ms = 1.11$ and $.47$, for depressed and nondepressed subjects, respectively), although this inconsistency was limited to depressed words rated twice as descriptive and once as nondescriptive.

Insert Table 3 about here

Table 3 summarizes recognition performance, and a significant Depression x Consistency/Descriptiveness interaction ($F(3,121) = 3.14$, $p < .03$) indicated that nondepressed subjects recognized

words consistently rated descriptive (M = 3.66) better than those rated nondescriptive (M = 3.42), thus indicating the characteristic recognition benefits for schema-congruent material over schema-incongruent material. Depressed subjects, on the other hand, do not demonstrate enhanced recognition for descriptive words over nondescriptive words. Rather, depressives show a suprising recognition benefit for descriptive words rated inconsistently (M = 3.84) over words rated ccnsistently (M = 3.54). According to previous suggestions of self-schematic investigators (e.g., Derry & Kuiper, 1981; Kuiper et al., 1982), one would expect information which is highly organized and stable to be processed and retrieved more efficiently than information which the person is uncertain about. It may be that in the absence of a well-integrated and powerful self-schema, mild depressives may utilize an alternative processing strategy, such as distinctiveness, when processing personal information.

Insert Table 4 about here

Looking at recognition only of self-rated items, as shown in Table 4, it can be seen that while nondepressed subjects recognized descriptive words better than nondescriptive words, there were no recognition differences between depressed- and nondepressed content words by the nondepressed subjects as had been expected. Depressed subjects, on the other hand, recognized nondepressed words better than depressed words, regardless of whether those words had been rated as descriptive or as

nondescriptive. Consequently, whereas descriptiveness or degree of fit to one's self-schema seems to be an important variable in processing information by nondepressives, it appears that depressives utilize an alternative processing strategy. One possiblity is that depressives show processing benefits for nondepressed material over depressed material because they are more familiar with the nondepressed features of themselves, given that they have only recently begun to include depressed features in their self-concept.

In summary, these findings suggest that depressed college students are more inconsistent in terms of their self-schema than their nondepressed counterparts, although there are indications that this inconsistency is limited to the depressed components of the self. It also appears that nondepressed and mildly depressed college students may utilize different information processing strategies, with nondepressives relying on congruence with the self-schema while depressives use a strategy based on familiarity or distinctiveness.

REFERENCES

Beck, A. T. *Depression Inventory*. Philadelphia: Center for Cognitive Therapy, 1978.

Buss, A. H. *Self-consciousness and social anxiety*. San Francisco, CA: W. H. Freeman, 1980.

Davis, H. Self-reference and the encoding of personal information in depression. *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 1979, 3, 97-110.

Davis, H., & Unruh, W. R. The development of the self-schema in adult depression. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 1981, 90, 125-133.

Dempsey, P. A. A unidimensional depression scale for the MMPI. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1964, 28, 364-370.

Derry, P. A., & Kuiper, N. A. Schematic processing and self-reference in clinical depression. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 1981, 90, 286-297.

Derry, P. A., & Kuiper, N. A. Content, imagery, social desirability, and emotionality ratings for depressed and nondepressed personal adjectives. Unpublished manuscript, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada, 1980.

Kuiper, N. A., Derry, P. A., & MacDonald, M. R. Self-reference and person perception in depression. In G. Weary and H. Mirels (Eds.), *Integrations of clinical and social psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Kuiper, N. A., & Derry, P. A. The self as a cognitive prototype: An application to person perception and depression. In N. Cantor & J. Kihlstrom (Eds.), Personality, social interaction, and cognition. Hillsdale, N. J.: Erlbaum, 1980.

Kuiper, N. A., & MacDonald, M. R. Self and other perception in mild depressives. Social Cognition, 1982, 1, 223-239.

Kuiper, N. A., Olinger, L. J., & MacDonald, M. R. Depressive schemata and the processing of personal and social information. In L. B. Alloy (Ed.), Cognitive processes in depression. New York: Guilford Press, in press.

Table 1

Mean Number of Consistent and Inconsistent Descriptiveness Ratings by Depressed and Nondepressed College Students as a Function of Word Content

	Subject Group	
	Depressed	Nondepressed
Depressed words		
Consistent-descriptive (3y)	1.94	.50
Consistent-nondescriptive (3n)	4.03	6.48
Inconsistent-descriptive (2y-1n)	.97	.32
Inconsistent-nondescriptive (1y-2n)	1.06	.70
Nondepressed words		
Consistent-descriptive (3y)	5.78	6.13
Consistent-nondescriptive (3n)	1.19	1.02
Inconsistent-descriptive (2y-1n)	.59	.38
Inconsistent-nondescriptive (1y-2n)	.44	.47

Table 2

Mean Number of Consistent and Inconsistent Self-Descriptiveness Ratings By Depressed and Nondepressed College Students as a Function of Word Content

	Subject Group	
	Depressed	Nondepressed
Depressed words		
Consistent-descriptive (3y)	2.50	.58
Consistent-nondescriptive (3n)	3.33	5.90
Inconsistent-descriptive (2y-1y)	1.11	.47
Inconsistent-nondescriptive (1y-2n)	1.06	1.05
Nondepressed words		
Consistent-descriptive (3y)	5.61	6.11
Consistent-nondescriptive (3n)	1.50	.89
Inconsistent-descriptive (2y-1n)	.50	.47
Inconsistent-nondescriptive (1y-2n)	.39	.53

Table 3

Recognition Performance (d′) by Depressed and Nondepressed College Students as a Function of Consistency and Descriptiveness

	Subject Group	
	Depressed	Nondepressed
Consistent		
Descriptive (3y)	3.54	3.66
Nondescriptive (3n)	3.55	3.42
Inconsistent		
Descriptive (2y-1n)	3.84	3.56
Nondescriptive (1y-2n)	3.73	3.34

Table 4

Recognition Performance (d') by Depressed and Nondepressed College Students of Self-Descriptiveness Rated Words as a Function of Word Content and Consistency/Descriptiveness

	Subject Group	
	Depressed	Nondepressed
Depressed words		
Consistent-descriptive (3y)	3.18	3.73
Consistent-nondescriptive (3n)	3.35	3.40
Inconsistent-descriptive (2y-1n)	3.76	3.86
Inconsistent-nondescriptive (1y-2n)	3.70	3.13
Nondepressed words		
Consistent-descriptive (3y)	3.54	3.66
Consistent-nondescriptive (3n)	3.75	3.28
Inconsistent-descriptive (2y-1n)	4.06	3.71
Inconsistent-nondescriptive (1y-2n)	3.70	3.41